

Amerasian Children, Hybrid Superiority, and Pearl S. Buck's Transracial and Transnational Adoption Activism

ABSTRACT: In 1949, Nobel and Pulitzer Prize-winning author Pearl S. Buck established Welcome House to provide long-term foster care for a small number of American-born, mixed-race children of Asian descent whom child welfare officials labeled unadoptable. With the assistance of her neighbors in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, Buck transformed Welcome House into an adoption agency that specialized in arranging transracial adoptions for the children she called Amerasians. Within a decade, Welcome House was also arranging transnational adoptions for mixed-race Korean children. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Buck encouraged adoptions of Amerasian children by insisting that they were biologically superior. While Buck's deployment of the concept of hybrid superiority is troubling today, she believed it would counter negative characterizations of Amerasian children that limited adoptions of this population. This article evaluates Buck's rhetoric of hybrid superiority and how it evolved to accommodate her efforts to build child welfare institutions in the United States and Korea.

IN 1949, NOBEL AND PULITZER Prize-winning author Pearl S. Buck opened the first permanent foster home for US-born, mixed-race children of Asian descent in her chosen hometown of Doylestown, Pennsylvania. She called it Welcome House. The name, and Buck's plan to provide a family for a small group of mixed-race children, grew out of her frustration with the widely held belief that such children were unadoptable. Because Buck was an adoptive mother, she knew that child welfare professionals and most adoptive couples were not in favor of transracial adoptions. She had agreed with that position and publicly opposed transracial adoption as late as 1946, even though the practice was almost unheard of in the 1940s. But the circumstances of two mixed-race boys caused Buck to hope that people in her community would welcome these children, even if no one would adopt them. Doylestown was home

to a number of affluent and successful artists, intellectuals, and professionals who, like Buck, commuted to cities like New York and Philadelphia for work. It was also home to many Mennonites and Quakers whose ancestors had settled in the area in the seventeenth century in search of religious freedom. The work that Buck and many of her neighbors did to gain the support of this unconventional mix of affluent cosmopolites and devout Christians would transform both the Welcome House and Buck's ideas about the adoptability of mixed-race children. Over the next decade and a half, Buck would modify the strategies she devised in Doylestown to promote her unconventional and often controversial plans to assist mixed-race children of Asian descent in the United States and abroad.¹

A number of scholars agree that Buck's role as an institution builder and celebrity activist played a part in expanding transracial and transnational adoption during the first decades of the Cold War. Laura Briggs identifies Welcome House as "one of the most important midcentury liberal adoption efforts." Buck's work at Welcome House was innovative, in part, because it challenged professional child welfare standards like the practice of matching, which social workers used to pair or match adoptees and adoptive families based on shared attributes like race and religion. Indeed, Ellen Herman explains that Buck was one of the three "most important early critics of matching." However, some scholars characterize aspects of Buck's post-World War II adoption work as a departure from her more progressive prewar anticolonial and antiracist activism. Notably, Christina Klein identifies Buck as a leading liberal activist whose critiques of racism in US domestic and foreign policy and production of middle-brow texts in the 1930s and 1940s positioned her solidly in the political sphere. Yet she suggests that Buck responded to pressure from the right to soften her position on political issues and pursue adoption and child

¹Buck justified her opposition to transracial adoption by noting that differences in both race and nationality would be difficult to resolve and potentially dangerous for the parents and children involved in such adoptions. Pearl S. Buck, "An Interview with My Adopted Daughter," *Cosmopolitan Magazine*, Apr. 1946, 96. Because some people assumed that her history in China had led her to adopt Chinese children, Buck revealed that her five adopted children were "100 percent white" in a 1939 article in the *Chelsea Evening Record* (she later adopted mixed-race children). Further, she explained that she was "opposed to the transplanting of young people [because] no child can thrive or flourish if it is uprooted at a tender age." Sylvia B. Richmond, "Need Not Sacrifice Children for Career: Pearl S. Buck Lists Simple Recipe of Careful Planning for Persons Wishing to Enjoy Varied Interests," *Chelsea Evening Record*, July 1, 1939, box 1, folder 18, series 2, record group 1, Pearl S. Buck and Richard J. Walsh Papers, Archives of Pearl S. Buck International, Perkasie, PA. Buck established Welcome House in 1949, one year after the first recorded adoption that placed an African American child with white adoptive parents took place in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

welfare reform. Klein contends that Buck's child-centric activism represented a retreat "into the private, traditionally female sphere of the family" where Buck could continue to "speak out on issues of racism and U.S.-Asian relations, although in a less direct way." This assessment, however, does not take into account the ways Buck's methods and motivations to assist mixed-race children of Asian descent evolved to meet the changing needs and sociopolitical contexts that defined these children's experiences. This article evaluates the strategies Buck used to promote long-term institutional care and adoptions—first for mixed-race children of Asian descent in the US, then for mixed-race children in Korea, and, finally, for full-Korean children—to show how her sharp critiques of racial inequality in adoption policies remained relevant throughout the 1950s and 1960s. I argue that Buck manipulated the theory of hybrid superiority to counter negative characterizations of mixed-race children and to critique the institutional and political barriers that limited adoptions and long-term care strategies for children in the United States and abroad.²

Buck's awareness of the plight of mixed-race children began when she was a young woman in China. Born in 1892 to Presbyterian missionaries, Buck observed early in her life the privations that Chinese children fathered by western European men experienced. As an adult, she recalled being troubled that "neither white or Asian accepted" this group. Before she left China in 1910 to attend Randolph-Macon Woman's College in Lynchburg, Virginia, Buck volunteered at the Door of Hope, a shelter

²Laura Briggs, *Somebody's Children: The Politics of Transracial and Transnational Adoption* (Durham, NC, 2012), 151; Ellen Herman, *Kinship by Design: A History of Adoption in the Modern United States* (Chicago, IL, 2008), 204; Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945–1961* (Berkeley, CA, 2003), 123, 135, 143–44, 178. Buck biographers often point to her liberal positions on a number of issues, including transracial and transnational adoption, to describe and explain the antiracist, anticolonial, and anticommunist nature of her activism during the Cold War era. But a number of scholars have interpreted Buck's activities and motivations differently. Emily Cheng notes that Buck's prewar and postwar activism retained elements of secular liberalism even though her "approach to race and family were congruent with the dominant logics of U.S. Cold War imperial expansion coupled with domestic containment, in particular the political investment in the family." Alternately, Arissa H. Oh explains that Buck's promotion of transracial and transnational adoption invoked vaguely Christian ideals, nationalism, and patriotism—what Oh calls "Christian Americanism." By explicitly identifying this form of child rescue as anticommunist and antiracist, Oh notes that Buck advanced a critique of US foreign policy that blamed the federal government for the pitiable status of Korean children awaiting adoption. Emily Cheng, "Pearl S. Buck's 'American Children': US Democracy, Adoption of the Amerasian Child, and the Occupation of Japan in *The Hidden Flower*," *Frontiers* 35, no. 1 (2014): 182; Arissa H. Oh, "Into the Arms of America: The Korean Roots of International Adoption" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2008), 212–13, 315–16, 317; Oh, *To Save the Children of Korea: The Cold War Origins of International Adoption* (Stanford, CA, 2015), 88.

and rescue center in Shanghai. At Door of Hope, she met women—some the mothers of mixed-race children—who were attempting to escape situations that made them targets of sexual exploitation at the hands of Chinese and European men alike. These experiences left a lasting impression on Buck and made her aware of the ways imperial relations of power produced gender and race hierarchies that victimized women and mixed-race children. Buck would later claim that memories of this time in her life made her determined that “wherever [she] saw evil and cruelty at work [she] would devote all [she] had to delivering its victims.” Although Buck often used her literary ventures to challenge injustice and promote equality, she would get many opportunities to put into practice the lofty ideal that took shape in her youth when she started working to help mixed-race children like the ones she encountered in China.³

Buck’s first opportunity began with a letter. In 1948, Frances Titus, director of the Community Home for Girls in Rochester, New York, contacted Buck to ask if she knew of anyone who would be willing to adopt a special toddler in Titus’s care. The child’s mother was a white American woman, and his father was a young man from India. Unmarried, the couple could not keep the boy. Neither of the parents’ families wanted to take the child, whom Titus determined was “of high intelligence . . . the finest child they had ever had.” The last option for this toddler was placement in a “Negro orphanage because he was brown.” Titus hesitated “to place a child into a situation of prejudices which he might escape for actually, he was Caucasian on both sides.” In many of her published accounts of this story, Buck was quick to defend Titus against charges that Titus was prejudiced against “Negroes.” But Buck and Titus well knew that placement in the “Negro” orphanage would cement the child’s status as a second-class citizen.⁴

After several friends proved unable to take him in, Buck and her family

³Pearl S. Buck, “Notes on Welcome House,” *Alumnae Bulletin*, Nov. 1955, 34–35, box 1, folder Letters, Jane Rabb Collection, Randolph-Macon Woman’s College Archives, Randolph College, Lynchburg, VA; Pearl S. Buck, *My Several Worlds* (New York, 1954) 49, 63, 69–70, 73. Buck noted that the sex trade involving Chinese peasant girls accelerated when the presence of European men increased in Shanghai in the late nineteenth century.

⁴Pearl S. Buck, “The Story of the Welcome House,” n.d., p. 1, Welcome House scrap book 2, series 4, record group 1, Buck and Walsh Papers, Archives of Pearl S. Buck International; Peter Conn, *Pearl S. Buck: A Cultural Biography* (New York, 1996), 312. Buck did not mention Titus in her early writings about Welcome House, but she did in letters describing Titus’s work with her in the 1960s. See, for example, Buck to Nathaniel Brewer, Aug. 15, 1968, box 44, folder 8, series 2, record group 1, Buck and Walsh Papers, Archives of Pearl S. Buck International .

decided to keep the boy at their home. Within a week, she learned of another mixed-race child who needed a home. This baby boy's parents were Chinese and white. Buck agreed to care for him too. Based on earlier experiences with social workers and adoption placement procedures, Buck was aware that she could not adopt these boys. She was fifty-six years old—sixteen years over the age limit most agencies set for potential adoptive parents. Instead, she began talking with her husband, Richard, and her Quaker neighbors Margaret and Kermit Fischer to see how they felt about her plan to create a long-term solution for the “wonderful American-Asian children.” Richard initially opposed her plan because he felt they *were* too old. Margaret, a former social worker, was on board, but her husband, Kermit, was hesitant. Margaret remembered Buck telling her they would “work on” their husbands to get their support because they needed money and advice from men. The “work” must have worked, because Richard and Kermit eventually agreed to help Pearl and Margaret. Using a lawyer associated with Kermit Fischer's firm, Fischer & Porter Co., Buck and the Fischers registered Welcome House with the State of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania on December 30, 1948. With the state's approval of their plan to operate a foster home in a single-family dwelling for American-born children, they incorporated Welcome House in the Bucks County Court of Common Pleas on May 16, 1949.⁵

State regulations required that Welcome House have a board of directors once the agency had more than two children, so Buck and Margaret Fischer asked prominent Doylestown residents to serve on the board. Judge Edward Biester and his wife, Muriel, were among the first people Buck and Fischer consulted. They hoped that the local judge's connections on the local orphans' court would help them navigate that court system. Seeing a conflict of interest, Judge Biester declined, but Muriel accepted. Buck's neighbor David Burpee, heir to and owner of the W. Atlee Burpee Company and Burpee Seeds (the largest seed company in the world), and his wife, Lois Torrance Burpee, a botanist, also became board members. Buck and Fischer became more confident that the board would be able to raise money and positively influence people's ideas about

⁵Buck, “Notes on Welcome House,” 34–35; Lois Burpee, interview by Nora Stirling, Feb. 24, 1976, box 9, folder “Burpee, Lois (Mrs. David), Pennsylvania neighbor and Welcome House supporter,” Nora B. Stirling Collection, Randolph College; Margaret Fischer, interview by Jane Rabb, May 26, 1978, tape recording, box 2, Jane Rabb Collection, Randolph College.

the children once the well-regarded lyricist and librettist Oscar Hammerstein II and his wife, Dorothy, joined.⁶

The money to support Welcome House came from donations and the board's fundraising efforts. Lois Burpee recalled that board members' first responsibility was to raise money, and they did so in a number of ways. Some gave talks for civic organizations or at local churches. Burpee and other residents of Doylestown volunteered at the Welcome House Thrift Shop so that they could donate the shop's proceeds to support the family and later the agency's adoption work. The Burpees also held events at their home on Fordhook Farm, and they allowed Buck to use an apartment in one of the buildings on the estate for the Welcome House office. Christmas-themed fundraising efforts were popular, and board members sponsored a Christmas card fund drive for several years. The Biesters hosted an annual Christmas dance party that once earned the house approximately \$1,000. The Hammersteins hosted four fashion shows featuring professional models. Dorothy Hammerstein donated money she earned as an interior designer, and she organized a number of theatrical shows that raised money for the Welcome House. Other board members gave money and resources to support the Welcome House family, and they encouraged friends and colleagues to do the same. Oscar Hammerstein's writing partner, Richard Rodgers, financed the first Welcome

⁶ Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 143; Buck, "Notes on Welcome House," 4–35; Lois Burpee, interview by Nora Stirling; Mary G. Graves, interview by Nora Stirling, June 27, 1976, box 9, folder "Graves, Mary L., executive director of Welcome House," Stirling Collection, Randolph College; Muriel Biester, interview by Nora Stirling, June 27, 1976, box 9, folder "Biester, Muriel, member of the East-West Association and supporter of Welcome House," Stirling Collection, Randolph College; Viola Yoder, interview by Nora Stirling, Feb. 23, 1976, box 9, folder "Yoder, Viola Sell (Mrs. Lloyd), with her husband, the first houseparents for Welcome House," Stirling Collection, Randolph College; "Children Referred," Welcome House Ledgers, Administrative Office File Cabinet, Pearl S. Buck International; Conn, *Pearl S. Buck*, 313, 314; Margaret Fischer, interview by Jane Rabb. Christina Klein notes that author James A. Michener was a member of the board and that he convinced Hammerstein to join, but neither Lois Burpee nor Margaret Fischer mentioned Michener as a part of the first group to weigh in on Welcome House. Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 174; Margaret Fischer, interview by Jane Rabb; "Lois Burpee Receives Award," ca. 1980, box 1, folder "Buck Miscellany," Rabb Collection, Randolph College. Burpee remembered that the Fischers introduced Buck and the Hammersteins, and she claimed that "the Michener came in and went out." Lois Burpee, interview by Nora Stirling. Michener claimed that Buck "had no help from either Hammerstein or me when she started. She had a lot of help from us later when she had the wheels already moving." Michener quoted in Conn, *Pearl S. Buck*, 314. Michener had grown up in Doylestown, and he became an influential member of the Welcome House board in its early years of operation. He and his second wife, Vange Nord, adopted two Welcome House children, and his third wife, Nori Yoriko Sabusawa Michener, helped Buck fundraise in Japan. "Women Organizing Adoption Unit Here," *New York Times*, Nov. 7, 1957; Caryn James, "The Michener Phenomenon: The Michener Formula Blends Documented Factual Events with Fictionalized Families," *New York Times*, Sept. 8, 1985.

House mortgage, and Hammerstein's son-in-law, Philip Mathias, wrote the play "With the Happy Children" about the Welcome House to raise funds for the cash-strapped venture.⁷

While board members' fundraising efforts were important, Buck also needed the help of better-connected neighbors. As Margaret Fischer put it, some people "had the idea that she was standoffish and didn't want to mingle with any of the community." Board members did much of the work of polling some of the town's residents to see if they would support the project. According to Fischer, some in the community were reluctant because they were either not interested in aiding Asian American children or because "Pearl was already stamped as being a leftist." Indeed, one month after its founders incorporated Welcome House, the *New York Sun* included Buck's name among a list of famous people California Republican state senator Jack Tenney accused of being communists. Buck quickly denied the accusation in a *New York Times* piece, but she continued to be rebaited. Fischer and Muriel Biester remembered that operating Welcome House was sometimes difficult because people also called them communists.⁸

The allegations that Buck was a communist had begun many years before she became an advocate of transracial and transnational adoption. In the 1930s, Buck had attracted the attention of Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) director J. Edgar Hoover soon after she returned to the United States from China. Hoover suspected that she was involved in subversive activities because she was an outspoken supporter of US civil rights and a fierce critic of colonialism and the legacies of imperialism in several Asian nations. Buck biographer Peter Conn notes that she had begun articulating a critique of US imperialism as early as 1925, when she

⁷Lois Burpee, interview by Nora Stirling; *Town Notes* (Bucks County, PA), Mar. 1, 1956; "Lois Burpee Receives Award"; Mary Graves, interview by Nora Stirling; Eve Eshleman, interview by Nora Stirling, Aug. 27, 1976, box 10, folder "Eva S. Eshleman, PSB's French teacher, beginning in 1963; resident of Kutztown, PA," Stirling Collection, Randolph College; Conn, *Pearl S. Buck*, 338. The *Town Notes* article notes that approximately sixty women were responsible for the operation of the thrift shop.

⁸Margaret Fischer, interview by Jane Rabb; Lois Burpee, interview by Nora Stirling; Pearl S. Buck, "Miss Buck Warns on Loss of Liberty: Lays Washington School Ban on Her Talk to False Date in House Committee's Files," *New York Times*, Jan. 28, 1951, 32; Conn, *Pearl S. Buck*, 312–14, 366; Muriel Biester, interview by Nora Stirling. Tenney was the head of the California Committee on Un-American Activities when he made the accusation. Conn notes that Tenney's list included Charles Chaplin, Langston Hughes, Gene Kelly, Gregory Peck, Buck's friend Paul Robeson, Frank Sinatra, and Orson Welles. For more on Tenney's accusation, Buck's denial, and the other names on the list, see Conn, *Pearl S. Buck*, 317.

wrote the essay “China and the West” while completing a master’s degree in English at Cornell University. This thesis revealed her discomfort with the ways Christian missionaries worked to alter traditional Chinese religious and social practices, and it touched on her belief that imperialism would increase anti-US sentiments throughout Asia. The essay also presented an argument that Buck would return to in her transnational adoption advocacy, namely that US imperialism damaged the nation’s reputation around the world. Following the publication of her best-selling novel *The Good Earth* in 1931, Buck’s reputation as an expert on issues concerning the so-called Far East grew, allowing her to continue to encourage political and popular support for China and Asian nations fighting for independence. These activities led Hoover to place Buck on the FBI’s watch list in 1935. By 1937, the agency had opened a file on Buck, and it monitored her activities for the rest of her life.⁹

In the 1940s, the FBI kept tabs on Buck because of her involvement with organizations including the East and West Association, American Civil Liberties Union, and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). Like many of the women affiliated with WILPF, Buck advocated peace, but she also supported US involvement in World War II. Throughout the war years, she used her celebrity to encourage people in the United States to learn more about their Eastern allies (often instructing them to contact her organization, the East and West Association) and to rally around “our belief in democracy as the hope of the human race” to defeat the nationalist regimes in power in Europe and Japan. But she remained critical of the nation’s domestic and foreign policies that reinforced inequality and oppression at home and abroad. After the war, she was critical of US women who did not take a moral stand against militarism, in part because she believed women were the moral leaders in society. She even suggested that women might make better foreign policy decisions. “We couldn’t make a worse job of it than the men have done,” she concluded. Buck’s lack of confidence in male political leadership and her disdain for British colonialism likely influenced her public critique of Winston Churchill after he delivered his “Iron Curtain” speech in March of 1946. According to Peter Conn, Hoover ordered further investigations of Buck’s activities, writings, and speeches after she accused Churchill of encouraging further subjugation of people living under oppressive regimes. Although the FBI concluded that Buck was

⁹Conn, *Pearl S. Buck*, 80–82, 172–75, 207, 261.

not a communist, questions about her loyalty to the United States cast a shadow over some of her efforts to aid oppressed peoples, including her work on behalf of children.¹⁰

Although suggestions that Buck was a subversive would persist in the 1950s, these attacks did not derail her plan for Welcome House, and Buck and the board were able to get the permission and support of Doylestown's storekeepers, local leaders, and school administrators to establish the foster home. Then Buck fashioned lives for the Welcome House family that could rival those of any of her well-to-do neighbors. Although Buck set up the first Welcome House in what she called "just a house, a big white farmhouse next door to our own," it was more than "just a house." Buck had the sixteen-room farmhouse adjacent to her rambling country cottage remodeled to make it suitable for the family. Next, she surrounded the family with the trappings of postwar modernity. She oversaw the selection of food, clothes, toys, and foster parents. Buck enlisted Lloyd and Viola Yoder, a well-liked Mennonite couple, to serve as the first Welcome House parents. Viola remembered that Buck supervised the meal planning, insisting that the children eat "spinach and baked potatoes . . . cereal that came from a certain mill, [a] certain bread." Buck personally purchased new clothing for the children, refusing to accept donated clothes that were of poor quality. Dana Akins, a schoolmate of the Welcome House children, remembered envying their clothes because they always had the latest fashions. The children attended the local schools, and they had tutors to assist with their education. Often, using her own strained resources, Buck paid for repairs to the house and family vacations. She endeavored to make sure the children would not simply have parents, a home, and access to food, clothes, toys, and education; they would have the best Doylestown could offer.¹¹

One of Buck's goals was to counter criticisms of the children by making their home lives recognizably American. After World War II, Americans

¹⁰Pearl S. Buck, "American Unity," p. 10, Apr. 8, 1942, box 5, folder 26, series 4, record group 5, Buck and Walsh Papers, Archives of Pearl S. Buck International; Pearl S. Buck, "A Letter to Colored Americans," Feb. 28, 1942, box 5, folder 32, series 4, record group 5, Buck and Walsh Papers, Archives of Pearl S. Buck International; Pearl S. Buck, War Script #6, n.d., box 5, folder 11, series 4, record group 5, Buck and Walsh Papers, Archives of Pearl S. Buck International; Pearl S. Buck and Eslanda Goode Robeson, *American Argument* (New York, 1949), 66, 93, 97–98, 164; Conn, *Pearl S. Buck*, 299–300, 326. Buck and Walsh founded the East and West Association in 1941 to promote greater understanding between the "ordinary people" living in these regions of the world.

¹¹Viola Yoder, interview by Nora Stirling; Dana Akins, interview by Nora Stirling, Mar. 27, 1976, box 9, folder "Akins, Dana—resident of Bucks County, Pennsylvania," Stirling Collection, Randolph College; Pearl S. Buck, *Children for Adoption* (New York, 1964), 83.

identified the family as a significant site of literal and figurative security where children learned morality, civic duty, and social order. The Welcome House family took this idea a step further by also modeling racial cooperation and acceptance. While mainstream popular culture depicted the ideal family as white, nuclear, and middle-class, Buck believed people would accept the Welcome House family because it conformed to postwar family ideals in all ways except for race and size. Buck was confident that the permanent foster home setting of Welcome House, although not an adoptive family, was significantly better than other institutional environments, and she tried to approximate patterns of nuclear family life for the Welcome House children. She capped the number of children the house could board to ten. Her efforts to provide a version of modern American family life for her charges became more difficult, though, as the number of children in the home increased. As early as 1950, Buck and Welcome House board members worried that they could not meet the needs of the many children being referred to their agency. They did not seriously pursue adoptions as a possible solution, however, because they did not think families would adopt mixed-race children. "Very few childless couples wish to adopt children of mixed parentage," Buck told the *New York Times*.¹²

Despite its efforts to make the Welcome House children appear as typically American as possible, the board could not mask the fact that the children's mixed-racial heritages made it very difficult to match them with parents who shared the same racial backgrounds. Board members also could not deny the ways that the children's racial identities revealed a level of interracial intimacy that confounded many in Buck's community. The ledgers Welcome House used to track all children referred to the agency show that the first ten children residing in the permanent foster home represented some combination of white American, East Indian, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean ancestry. Although mixed-race children of Asian descent were uncommon wards in American adoption agencies, the ledgers further show that they represented a growing placement challenge by the early 1950s. Successive entries record intimacies between a white

¹²Buck, *Children for Adoption*, 53–54, 70; "More Interest Seen in Adoption Problem," *New York Times*, June 2, 1950; Barbara Melosh, *Strangers and Kin: The American Way of Adoption* (New York, 2002), 149. On changes in American families during the Cold War, see Wendy Kozol, *Life's America: Family and the Nation in Postwar Photojournalism* (Philadelphia, 1994); Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York, 1988); and Joanne Meyerwitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945–1960* (Philadelphia, 1994).

woman and a Chinese man, an Italian American woman and a Hawaiian man of Chinese descent, and a Puerto Rican woman and a man with both African American and white ancestry. These relationships were culturally taboo if not—as in some states—legally prohibited, and they suggest the daunting nature of placement for mixed-race children in racially segregated communities in the United States. Furthermore, few adoption agencies made transracial placements. As Peter Conn explains, states that had not enacted laws against transracial adoption prior to the 1950s—when “the prospect of such adoptions was so remote”—began introducing laws prohibiting the practice. These circumstances explain why child welfare agencies continued to refer hard-to-place children to Welcome House.¹³

The evolution of Welcome House from a permanent foster home to an adoption agency began when Buck brought home a mixed-raced baby of Japanese descent named Lenny. Whenever Buck described the origins of the idea that Welcome House could be an adoption agency, she explained that this child caused her to seriously wonder if families in her community would consider a transracial adoption. Could communities like hers embrace children whose racial differences would make it impossible to hide the adoption? Muriel Biester remembered that Buck posed this question during a talk in the neighboring town of Langhorne, Pennsylvania, in 1951. According to Biester, Buck was speaking on an unrelated topic when she unexpectedly asked, “is there an adopting family in this audience for a lovely Japanese baby?” At the end of the talk, three couples approached Buck to express interest in adopting Lenny. Ultimately a minister and his wife, one of the couples at the talk, did adopt him. This response suggested to Buck that the answer to her question was “yes,” and she jumped at the opportunity to expand the agency’s mission. Lois Burpee recalled that Welcome House Adoption Agency accepted ten children and placed six in 1951, and in 1952 the agency accepted twelve children and placed ten. By the end of 1952, over eighty families had submitted applications to adopt a Welcome House child. From that point on, Welcome House also served as an adoption agency. Buck happily proclaimed that her “faith in Americans [was] renewed with every adoption.”¹⁴

¹³“Children Referred,” Welcome House Ledgers, entries 1–20, Administrative Office File Cabinet, Pearl S. Buck International; Peter Conn, *Adoption: A Brief Social and Cultural History* (New York, 2013), 95.

¹⁴Buck, “Notes on Welcome House,” 36; Muriel Biester, interview by Nora Stirling; Lois Burpee, interview by Nora Stirling; “Children Referred,” Welcome House Ledgers, Administrative Office File Cabinet, Pearl S. Buck International.

Buck often emphasized the ways Welcome House adoptions did more than make new families. She believed they also performed antiracist and anticommunist work that benefited the nation. This strategy helped Buck increase support for Welcome House beyond Doylestown, Pennsylvania, early in her advocacy of transracial adoption. Buck commented to the *Saturday Review* in 1952 that she was encouraged because, in spite of the persistence of American racism, she continued to meet parents who wanted to adopt mixed-race children. These families proved to her that there was “a true democratic spirit” in the United States. They also disproved the “communist propaganda [that] tells [Asians] that Americans hate Asians, and they want to see if we do treat the children with Asian blood as our own.” Cognizant of the ways US race relations hurt the nation’s international reputation, Buck suggested that transracial adoptions proved Americans’ commitment to the principles of democracy. The practice, she argued, held significance for US domestic and foreign policy.¹⁵

The permanent foster home setting of Welcome House was a crucial training ground where Buck could test out some of her more radical ideas about adoptive family formation. Disregarding the view that adoption should be private, Buck solicited the input and support of her local community and deliberately made the activities of the Welcome House children open to public observation. She and Welcome House board members also hosted talks, dinners, and parties to discuss the children and highlight their superior qualities. The home served as a living laboratory where the domestic intimacy of the foster family was supposed to approximate the experiences of its neighbors so closely that it would naturalize families made across racial lines and neutralize the most destructive ideas about racial inferiority.

When Welcome House expanded its charter and became a full-fledged adoption agency, Buck crafted a narrative that highlighted the successes of the foster family setting. Whether speaking to small crowds, writing for popular magazines, or soliciting money from local organizations, Buck hoped to change the opinions of people in areas where families were likely to adopt one of the children. To accomplish this goal, she always described the children as beautiful and intelligent, as did some of the families who adopted from her agency. Alice Hammerstein Mathias,

¹⁵ Rochelle Girson, “Welcome House,” *Saturday Review*, July 26, 1952, 21; Buck, “The Story of the Welcome House,” 2.

daughter of Oscar Hammerstein, praised the intellectual prowess of her half-white, half-Japanese-American children. "Both of them are very bright," she proudly proclaimed, and "cute as a button." Eve Eshleman, one of Buck's associates, remembered that Buck always identified and presented the "mixed-blood" children as "intelligent." Buck frequently mentioned the superiority of the Welcome House children to demonstrate that the children's finest qualities would flourish in an integrated environment.¹⁶

These efforts did not deflect all resistance to or criticism of Buck's experiment in transracial family formation. As historian Ellen Herman notes, popular and professional ideas about "children's hereditary taint [had] faded" by the 1950s for white adoptable children, but this was not the case for mixed-race children. Some Doylestown residents maintained a belief in the innate inferiority of non-white children or had trouble imagining a place for mixed-race children in the social life of their community. Buck remembered that one of the older residents of the community declared, "if any of those damned half-breed children marries one of my grandchildren, I will see you goddamned to hell." Although decidedly less hostile and aggressive than this man, it seems that others in the community shared his concerns. The first Welcome House foster mom, Viola Yoder, remembered that her neighbors wondered, "what are these children going to do when it comes to dating?"¹⁷

Buck responded to questions about interracial dating by again emphasizing the children's positive attributes, which outweighed any concerns about racial difference. In 1955, she insisted that two of the Welcome House children were ideal dating prospects for any of the Doylestown youth. The oldest child "had more girls interested in him than the average

¹⁶ Alice Hammerstein Mathias, interview by Nora Stirling, Oct. 27, 1977, box 10, folder "Mathias, Alice, daughter of Oscar Hammerstein, Welcome House adoptive parent," Stirling Collection, Randolph College; Eva F. Eshleman, interview by Nora Stirling, Aug. 27, 1976, box 10, folder "Eva F. Eshleman, PSB's French teacher, beginning in 1963; resident of Kutztown, PA," Stirling Collection, Randolph College. Buck's emphasis on the beauty and intelligence of the Welcome House children resembled ideas promoted by sociologists in the early twentieth century to challenge negative ideas about mixed-race Chinese children. Rejecting the theory of hybrid degeneracy, these sociologists theorized that mixed-race children possessed superior qualities from both sides of their ancestry. Emma Jinhau Teng traces the idea of hybrids as "intelligent, strong, fit, and beautiful" in *Eurasian: Mixed Identities in the United States, China, and Hong Kong, 1842-1943* (Oakland, CA, 2013), 131.

¹⁷ Herman, *Kinship by Design*, 144; Buck, "Notes on Welcome House," 37, 38; Viola Yoder, interview by Nora Stirling. For more on the legal and cultural regulations of interracial intimacy, see Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (New York, 2009), 2-14.

boy has,” while the oldest daughter had “plenty of dates.” In both cases, she based her assessments of the young peoples’ prospects on their physical appearances, winsome personalities, and gender-appropriate behaviors. According to Buck, the young man was “a handsome fellow and a good athlete” who had voluntarily entered the military. She also bragged that the young woman was “pretty and sweet.”¹⁸

Welcome House children were not the first to confront anxieties about interracial intimacy. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, nativists used legal and social means to maintain segregation, including between whites and people of Asian descent. In the wake of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and the 1907 Gentleman’s Agreement between the United States and Japan, Asian immigration shrank to negligible numbers. The anti-Asian sentiments that facilitated these changes, however, persisted into the second half of the twentieth century. Buck and Walsh attempted to counter anti-Asian sentiment and promote greater cultural understanding in a number of ways, including the creation of the East and West Association and their acquisition of *ASIA* magazine in the early 1940s. Yet even after the repeal of Chinese exclusion laws in 1943, statutes and customs limited where Asians lived, went to school, or worked, as well as whom they married. While anti-miscegenation laws were not uniform across the nation, a number of western states had passed statutes prohibiting marriages between whites and people who identified as Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Malay, or Hindu. Pennsylvania lawmakers had done away with the commonwealth’s anti-miscegenation laws in the late eighteenth century and school segregation in the late nineteenth century, but Buck knew that residents of Doylestown were not immune to the pervasive messages about the dangers of miscegenation.¹⁹

To challenge these ideas, Buck relied on the language of hybrid superiority—or hybrid vigor—used by some researchers in the botanical sciences and genetics. When she compared mixed-race children to hybrid strains of corn and roses that possessed “rare qualities, so rare that the

¹⁸ Buck, “Notes on Welcome House,” 38.

¹⁹ Conn, *Pearl S. Buck*, 243–46, 273–74. Buck and Walsh founded another organization, the Citizens Committee to Repeal Chinese Exclusion, to lobby for the repeal of the laws that barred Chinese immigration and naturalization. For more on anti-miscegenation legislation, see M. T. Lui, *The China Town Trunk Mystery: Murder, Miscegenation, and Other Dangerous Encounters in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Princeton, NJ, 2007); Randall Kennedy, *Interracial Intimacies: Sex, Marriage, Identity, and Adoption* (New York, 2003), 18–19; Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally* (New York, 2009); and Paul R. Spickard, *Mixed Blood: Inter-marriage and Ethnic Identity in Twentieth-Century America* (Madison, WI, 1989).

waste [of these children] was intolerable," she aligned herself with researchers who observed genetic advantages in hybrid generations. It is likely that Buck discussed these ideas with her neighbors David and Lois Burpee, whose seed company was famous for producing hearty hybrid seeds. David was also a distant cousin of botanist and horticulturist Luther Burbank, who pioneered plant hybridization techniques. Not an academically trained scientist, Burbank continued to believe that organisms could inherit qualities from the environment in spite of Gregor Mendel's research in plant hybridity that had established the biological basis for gene transmission in the late nineteenth century. Burbank was also willing to extrapolate his findings onto humans to suggest that race mixing was positive for the US population, and he devoted a section of his aptly named book, *The Training of the Human Plant*, to the subject. According to geneticists Bentley Glass and Curt Stern, many trained scientists of the early twentieth century "had no doubt that what they had discovered about plant and animal heredity in other sexually reproducing species was applicable to humanity also." These explanations of hybrid vigor in plants and animals captivated Buck, even though they were and had been controversial.²⁰

The scientists and researchers who rejected the theory of hybrid vigor in humans during the first half of the twentieth century instead argued that miscegenation produced genetic degeneracy. Such claims gained scientific validity in the late nineteenth century based on the work of Englishman Francis Galton, the father of eugenics. Galton's efforts to explain and manipulate human heredity based on Charles Darwin's theory of evolution led him to conclude that reproduction between so-called superior and inferior races would lead to a decline in the superior race. A number of theorists in genetics, ethnology, and sociology developed similar ideas to discourage interracial intimacy and reproduction. Although scholars have determined that Galton "based his quantitative analysis of hereditary mental differences between races upon faulty assumptions and

²⁰Buck, "Notes on Welcome House," 35. Luther Burbank, *The Training of the Human Plant* (New York, 1907); Bentley Glass and Curt Stern, "Geneticists Embattled: Their Stand against Rampant Eugenics and Racism in America during the 1920s and 1930s," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 130 (1986): 131. Sociologists coined the term "constructive miscegenation" to describe the type of selective race mixing that would produce hybrid vigor. Teng, *Eurasian*, explains that some theorists believed that only proximate racial groups produced superior offspring (88–105, 117–20). For more on an alternative version of hybrid exceptionalism proposed by early twentieth-century sociologists, see Teng, 154–58.

scanty evidence,” his ideas continued to influence scientific investigation into the twentieth century.²¹

The eugenics movement lost considerable popular and scientific support after World War II, when some geneticists began to criticize the science behind eugenics and point out flaws in the theory of hybrid inferiority. Herbert Spencer Jennings and George Snell were among this group, and Buck often echoed their arguments to promote transracial adoption. Jennings postulated that miscegenation would lead to “some disharmonious combinations and some superior combinations,” and he continued to make this claim throughout his life. George Snell concluded based on a survey of decades of research that hybridity was a vital element in the formation of civilized societies. He believed hybridity was beneficial because “race crossing . . . produces individuals of exceptional vitality and vigor.” Buck was familiar with Snell’s work and in one instance paraphrased him: “a hybrid people has always a higher intelligence and a beauty greater than is possessed by the so-called ‘pure’ races.” These claims appeared in her speeches, books, and articles about adoption to demonstrate that “these children are an asset anywhere.”²²

By promoting the idea that mixed-race children were superior, Buck

²¹Michael Bulmer, *Francis Galton: Pioneer of Heredity and Biometry* (Baltimore, MD, 2003), 43–46; William B. Provine, “Geneticists and the Biology of Race Crossing,” *Science* 182 (1973): 790–96; Melissa N. Stein, *Measuring Manhood: Race and the Science of Masculinity, 1830–1934* (Minneapolis, MN, 2015), 52–56, 170–74. Leaders in the twentieth-century eugenics movement, including Charles B. Davenport, Edward M. East, and Harry Laughlin, built on Galton’s theories to promote the segregation or sterilization of individuals they deemed unfit to reproduce, as well as to advocate for immigration and marriage restrictions. At the height of the US eugenics movement in the 1930s and 1940s, thirty-two states had sterilization programs that used coercive and deceptive tactics to medically sterilize racial minorities, the mentally and physically disabled, and the poor. The eugenics movement declined after World War II, in part because Adolf Hitler and the Nazis used eugenics to justify the extermination of millions of Jews and so-called undesirables. Several scholars note that eugenic ideas and practices did not disappear in the postwar decades. Indeed, Stern argues, debates about eugenics informed developments in medical genetics and population control. For more on eugenics in the United States, see Elazar Barkan, *Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States between the World Wars* (New York, 1992); Edwin Black, *War against the Weak: Eugenics and America’s Campaign to Create a Master Race* (New York, 2003); Adam Cohen, *Imbeciles: The Supreme Court, American Eugenics, and the Sterilization of Carrie Buck* (New York, 2016); Wendy Kline, *Building a Better Race: Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Baby Boom* (Berkeley, CA, 2001); Paul A. Lombardo, *Three Generations, No Imbeciles: Eugenics, the Supreme Court, and Buck v. Bell* (Baltimore, MD, 2010); and Alexandra Minna Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (Berkeley, CA, 2005).

²²Buck, *My Several Worlds*, 351; Pearl S. Buck, “American Children: Alien by Birth,” *Ladies’ Home Journal*, Nov. 1964, 39; Glass and Stern, “Geneticists Embattled,” 142; George D. Snell, “Hybrids and History: The Role of Race and Ethnic Crossing in Individual and National Achievement,” *Quarterly Review of Biology* 26 (1951): 331; Buck, “Notes on Welcome House,” 33.

challenged the legacies of eugenics and the remnants of the one-drop rule of racial identity that influenced adoption policies. Until the 1950s, most child welfare officials resisted placing children across lines of race, but issues of supply and demand caused some adoption seekers to consider transracial placements. Some child welfare professionals also embraced the ideals of democracy and equality, which gained urgency following the World War II defeat of brutally racist regimes in Europe. However, child welfare professionals' best intentions did not end racial inequality in adoption. Consequently, the non-white children who needed greater access to adoption services often remained underserved. Buck highlighted these contradictions when she criticized US child welfare communities and justified her work at Welcome House.²³

Early in her advocacy of transracial adoption, Buck publicly objected to the ways many adoption agencies adhered to a form of the one-drop rule, which fixed mixed-race children's membership in communities of color. Many child welfare officials considered same-race adoptions healthiest for children, but mixed-race children confounded this logic. Since these children did not fit neatly into one racial category, social workers attempted to match children with any known or visible non-white ancestry with families that represented that racial or ethnic identity. Buck challenged this practice of hypodescent by suggesting that love and not race should influence placement decisions. "Time and again," she explained, "we have proved that race and religion do not matter. All that matters is the ability to love." In the 1950s, Buck was among a small group of professional and non-professional adoption reformers that was beginning to challenge the laws and practices that supported matching. Herman explains that these reformers had to contend with state laws that "treated religion as a birth right, not an individual choice." Some states had passed such laws in the late nineteenth century, in part as a response to complaints from Catholics who worried because Protestants were placing Catholic children with Protestant families. But religious matching became less consequential by the 1960s among people who believed religion was cultural and could, therefore, be taught. Ideas about the significance of race matching would prove harder to unmoor. Buck emphasized her personal and professional experiences with transracial adoption to appeal to prospective adoptive families.²⁴

²³Melosh, *Strangers and Kin*, 162–63; Herman, *Kinship by Design*, 196–98.

²⁴Buck, *Children for Adoption*, 90; Herman, 50, 125–28, 252. Buck's opinions about organized religion evolved over her lifetime. Although she was a member of the Presbyterian Church and spent time as a missionary, she publicly and controversially broke with the church in the 1930s. Buck

Instead of adhering to racial or religious matching, Buck applied what she thought were common-sense reforms to child placement, which brought her into conflict with officials in many child welfare and adoption agencies. Social work professionals questioned Buck's tactics because she lacked any professional training. Therefore, Buck pointed to other experiences to justify her involvement in adoptive child placements, and she exploited postwar gender conventions that emphasized motherhood and the home as a site of literal and symbolic security. In popular magazines and public forums, Buck suggested that her role as a biological and adoptive mother prepared her to make decisions about child placement. Buck had one biological daughter and seven adopted children. Her biological daughter, Carol, was born in 1920 and was developmentally disabled as a result of Phenylketonuria. Buck had a hysterectomy after Carol's birth because of complications that occurred during the delivery. Since Buck and her first husband, John Lossing Buck, wanted to have more children, they adopted their second daughter, Janice, in 1925. Following her divorce from John Lossing Buck and marriage to her second husband, Richard Walsh, Buck began filling her home with children. Buck and Walsh adopted two infant sons in 1936 and another son and daughter in 1937. In 1951, they adopted an Afro-German daughter, their first trans-racial and transnational adoption. In 1957, they adopted their last child, an Afro-Japanese daughter. The couple continued to foster several more children of various racial and national backgrounds throughout the 1960s. Buck considered her family to be evidence of her ability to make sound decisions about children's lives and proof that she could help others navigate the challenges of multiracial adoptive families.²⁵

Buck also reasoned that reforms were necessary because social workers did not prioritize the placement needs of mixed-race children like those at Welcome House. She put this idea into practice when she designed rather informal methods for screening prospective adoptive families. For nineteen years, she worked out of her home or at the office on Fordhook

biographer Peter Conn notes that Buck's public criticisms of missionary work in a speech, "Is There A Case for Foreign Missions," and her subsequent endorsement of a more inclusive and less dogmatic experience of faith in the article "Easter 1933" led to her resignation from the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions in 1933. Buck was always complimentary of her Mennonite and Quaker neighbors, but she remained critical of organized religion for facilitating oppression and exploitation, especially in formerly colonized nations. Conn, *Pearl S. Buck*, 148–49, 153–55.

²⁵ Conn, *Pearl S. Buck*, 188, 328, 341; Pearl S. Buck, "Pearl Buck's Children: 'Bless the Day They were Born,'" *Beckley (WV) Post-Herald*, Aug. 22, 1967; Girson, "Welcome House," *Saturday Review*; and Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 178.

Farm. She reviewed the applications of all the couples that expressed an interest in adopting a Welcome House child. According to Muriel Biester, she and Buck then conducted a home study to determine if applicants were suitable. After an initial meeting, Buck and Biester visited a second time before placing a child. Biester visited families once or twice during the trial placement period, which lasted between six months and one year. While the agency did have a formal application process in the early years, as Biester recalled, "Pearl and I did do the sizing up and the accepting." Neither Buck nor Biester had any experience in child placement. Biester explained, "I'm no social worker but you can smell people."²⁶

To child welfare professionals, relying on their abilities to "smell people" was potentially dangerous. Throughout the 1950s, professional adoption practitioners became more invested in the rational, scientific approach to placement, which included evaluations of children and families before an adoption. Welcome House board members were less invested in the rational approach, but they did employ full-time social workers beginning in 1952 as the operations of the adoption agency began to exceed Buck and Biester's ability to manage alone. Buck had considerable influence over these decisions, however, and she hired people who were comfortable with her selection criteria. Child welfare officials with such organizations as the US Children's Bureau (USCB) and the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) worried that this approach increased the likelihood of adoption failures. Although Biester remembered that this situation occurred "no more than four or five times," Welcome House did have to take children back in cases where couples changed their minds or a family's circumstances changed as a result of divorce.²⁷

Officials with the USCB and the CWLA had been working since the 1920s to combat informal screening practices and increase the regulation of adoption agencies. These organizations spearheaded the implementation of national standards to safeguard all parties involved in adoption, especially the children. Although CWLA introduced standards for adoption in the 1930s and 1940s, the pre-World War II years had seen the

²⁶Muriel Biester, interview by Nora Stirling.

²⁷Herman, *Kinship by Design*, 121–91; Muriel Biester, interview by Nora Stirling; Mary Graves, interview by Nora Stirling. In 1954, James Michener and his wife Vange Nord had to return one of the two boys they received from Welcome House. The couple began divorce proceedings before the adoption of one of their sons was finalized. Because their marital status changed, they could not complete the adoption. Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 174.

expansion of baby farms and black- and gray-market adoptions involving lawyers and brokers. These methods of adoption introduced market considerations into the adoption process by charging fees, compensating birth mothers, and, in the worst cases, selling children. Officials with USCB and CWLA believed standards and the professionalization of adoption would help limit these types of abuses, but many adoption seekers resisted the investigations and delays that standardization introduced.²⁸

After World War II, the CWLA began revising some of the requirements that drove would-be adopters to independent, black-, or gray-market adoptions. CWLA officials endorsed reducing the long waiting periods, which prospective adoptive couples often found discouraging. By the 1950s, the CWLA had also reversed its position that the adoption of infants was ill advised, and it deemphasized the role of heredity in determining how a child would fare in any given family. However, CWLA made standards the centerpiece of its annual conference in 1955, and officials convened a number of committees to develop standards to protect adoptees. These deliberations led to the creation of the 1958 *Standards for Adoption Service* handbook, which emphasized the importance of investigation and affirmed the value of the social worker's role in facilitating child placements. But private and independent agencies like Welcome House did not have to follow these standards. Instead, Welcome House board members made sure the agency met the requirements set by the Pennsylvania Department of Child Welfare governing private agencies, which made it possible for Buck to continue to influence placement decisions.²⁹

Efforts to regulate adoption standards met with resistance from Buck and other nonprofessionals, who throughout the 1950s and 1960s rejected the idea that social workers were uniquely qualified to make decisions about child placement. Since child welfare communities had largely focused their efforts on placing white children, nonprofessionals who worked to place children of color felt justified in questioning social workers' authority. As Ellen Herman describes, only after World War II did some social workers in child welfare and adoption agencies begin "cele-

²⁸ Herman, 31–45.

²⁹ Herman, 144, 148–53. For more on institutional responses to unwed pregnancy throughout the twentieth century, see Regina G. Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work, 1890–1945* (New Haven, CT, 1993); and Rickie Solinger, *Wake Up Little Susie: Single Pregnancy and Race before Roe v. Wade* (New York, 1994).

brating the democratization of adoption services as a sign of enlightenment, progress, civil rights, and deinstitutionalization within the child welfare world." But nonprofessionals like Buck remained skeptical of child welfare professionals, and her challenge of child welfare professionals' standards helped undermine the status of social workers among lay people and some prospective adoptive parents. The women whom many had "considered natural child placers by virtue of sex" became targets of harsh criticism. Many social workers, Buck argued, failed to truly promote democratic principles or care for children of color.³⁰

By the mid-1950s, Buck was encouraging Welcome House to get involved in US-Korean adoption, and in 1956 Welcome House Adoption Agency gained approval from the Pennsylvania Department of Child Welfare to coordinate transnational adoptions. Moved by the plight of Korean GI babies, Buck revised her message about the superior qualities of mixed-race children of Asian descent to promote adoptions of Korea's mixed-race children. She used the strategies honed in her appeals on behalf of Welcome House to influence readers of magazines including *Good Housekeeping*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Women's Home Companion*, *Reader's Digest*, and *Ebony*. Buck continued to invoke hybrid superiority to refute negative stereotypes about Korean mixed-race children, whom she described as "beautiful, nearly always . . . more handsome and intelligent than either side of their ancestry." They were, she argued repeatedly, "above average in looks and brains." Accompanying pictures depicted the transformative power of adoptive homes by showing the pre-adoption child isolated and in rags but the post-adoption child surrounded by loving adults, books, toys, and other well-dressed, well-fed children. This strategy was not new. As historian Laura Briggs notes, a number of agencies crafted sentimental narratives, which offered "an ideology of rescue by white people of non-white people, inside and outside the United States." But Buck's references to mixed-race Korean children's superior traits also suggested that they brought something valuable to the rescue scenario and were not simply recipients of humanitarian benevolence.³¹

Buck received mixed reactions to her efforts to expand the Welcome House mission to include transnational placements. Couples interested in

³⁰Herman, 196, 211, 222, 227.

³¹Buck, "Welcome House," 47; Pearl S. Buck, "The Children America Forgot," *Reader's Digest*, Sept. 1967, 109; Laura Briggs, "Mother, Child, Race, Nation: The Visual Iconography of Rescue and the Politics of Transnational and Transracial Adoption," *Gender and History* 15 (2003): 181; and Pearl S. Buck, *Welcome Child* (New York, 1963), 7.

Korean adoption, including some rejected by mainstream adoption agencies, were happy to work with Welcome House. Conversely, agencies with longer track records in domestic and international child welfare were skeptical of Buck's methods. Chief among her critics were officials with International Social Services (ISS), which supported the creation of stringent regulations to safeguard Korean adoptees. Founded in 1924 to address the needs of migrants relocating across national borders, ISS maintained branches in cities around the world. After World War II, the agency became more involved in transnational adoptions, and although ISS staff did not arrange adoptions, they began linking US and Korean agencies to coordinate adoptions between the two nations in 1953.³²

ISS officials worked to regulate and reduce the dangers associated with transnational adoptions. They were particularly concerned about agencies that endorsed and facilitated proxy adoptions, including Welcome House. This procedure allowed prospective adoptive parents to legally designate another person to stand in for them in a foreign country to finalize that nation's adoption requirements. Using a proxy, adopting parents could and did adopt children they had never even met. Child welfare officials with ISS and USCB worked to outlaw the practice, which they believed put children at risk and could lead to failed adoptions. ISS and USCB wanted agencies to provide foreign-born adoptees the same protections that adoptees in the United States received, and they monitored the activities of proxy adoption proponents, including Buck and Harry Holt, who famously facilitated the adoptions of thousands of Korean children by proxy. Although Holt and Buck's adoption philosophies were quite different, apprehensive ISS officials maintained files on both of their agencies.³³

³²"Have Jacket Will Travel . . . The Story of WAIF-ISS," n.d., box 4, folder ISS 1957, International Social Service (ISS) United States of America Branch records, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota; ISS Minutes of Board of Directors Meeting, Sept. 23, 1954, box 4, folder ISS 1954, ISS records, University of Minnesota. Points of view in this article are the author's and do not necessarily represent the official position of policies of International Social Service, United States of American Branch, Inc. (ISS-USA). For more information about ISS-USA, see <http://www.iss-usa.org>.

³³Katherine B. Oettinger, Testimony before the Subcommittee on Immigration and Naturalization, May 20, 1959, box 132, file 7-3-1-3, Records of the U.S. Children's Bureau, Record Group 102, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD. For more on proxy adoption, see Catherine Ceniza Choy, *Global Families: A History of Asian International Adoption in America* (New York, 2013), 82-95; Kim Park Nelson, *Invisible Asians: Korean American Adoptees, Asian American Experiences, and Race Exceptionalism* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2016), 52-54; and Oh, *To Save the Children of Korea*, 52-53. Many child welfare and adoption agencies criticized Harry Holt's methods, but many scholars of Korean transnational adoption identify him as the father of Korean adoption. For more on Holt and his role in the development of Korean transnational adoption, see Choy, 81-95; and Oh, 89-111.

Buck's endorsement of proxy adoption put her at odds with ISS and USCB, but Welcome House's relationship with the two agencies did not begin acrimoniously. When Welcome House began placing children for adoption, USCB officials were aware of Buck's pioneering work to provide homes for mixed-race children of Asian descent, and they had referred people interested in transracial adoption to Welcome House in the agency's early years. But USCB also attempted to keep track of Buck's activities and frequently received letters and memoranda from child welfare officials describing outrageous or disparaging claims Buck had made about social workers or adoption standards. Similarly, officials with ISS were not initially opposed to working with Welcome House, and in 1956 Welcome House and ISS conducted talks to see if the two agencies could work together on behalf of Korean adoptees. With disagreements on the best way to coordinate services, the talks fell through. This turn of events did not completely sour ISS officials' opinions of Buck, who joined the advisory council for the ISS American branch the following year.³⁴

The relationship between ISS and Buck deteriorated following their attempt to issue a joint appeal to African Americans to increase their adoptions of Korean-black children. Because of Buck's reputation as a respected advocate for civil rights, ISS assistant director Susan T. Pettiss asked her to write an article for the African American magazine *Ebony* to explain the need for African American adoptive parents. The article Buck wrote, "Should White Parents Adopt Brown Babies?" impressed the magazine's readership. Welcome House received 625 inquiries from African American families interested in adoption in the months after its publication. ISS had wanted Buck to direct all inquiries to its American branch office, but she made no mention of the agency and instead encouraged readers to contact Welcome House. This decision infuriated ISS director William T. Kirk, and, in the years that followed, ISS officials were reluctant to collaborate with Buck or Welcome House.³⁵

Criticism from ISS and other agencies working to coordinate US-

³⁴I. Evelyn Smith to Elizabeth Parkhill, May 1952, box 451, file 7-3-3-4-1, 194901952, Appeals from People Wishing Children for Adoptions, U.S. Children's Bureau Records, National Archives; Mrs. George Berberian Sr. to President Dwight Eisenhower, Sept. 18, 1955, box 684, file 7-3-3-4, U.S. Children's Bureau Records, National Archives.

³⁵Minutes of International Social Service National Advisory Council, Oct. 1957, box 4, folder ISS 1957, ISS records, University of Minnesota; Susan T. Pettiss to Mrs. Richard J. Walsh (Pearl S. Buck), May 10, 1957, box 23, folder Associations Welcome House, 1955, ISS records; Minutes of International Social Service National Advisory Council, Oct. 1957, box 4, folder ISS 1957, ISS records, University of Minnesota.

Korean adoptions were valid given what happened when a transnational adoption failed. If family members decided they could not keep their Korean adoptee, the child entered the US child welfare system until social workers could find a new adoptive family or make other arrangements. Buck was aware of these risks, but she considered the dangers far worse for mixed-race children who remained in Korea. Many of Korea's displaced children experienced neglect, starvation, and death because of the Korean investment in racial purity. In 1955, Ellen Visser of the Korean Civil Assistance Command reported that Korean officials were "anxious to get these children out." Visser also complained that her organization was getting pressure from South Korean president Syngman Rhee's office to explain why the children were not leaving in larger numbers. By 1956, representatives of ISS agonized over rumors that President Rhee "did not care what happened so long as the children were got out of the country—and quickly." These circumstances provided the justification Buck needed to continue her endorsement of proxy adoptions, and she encouraged couples to adopt while US immigration legislation allowed proxy arrangements.³⁶

Korean-black children proved hardest to place, and Buck believed that flexible adoption standards could help this population. By the late 1960s, a decade into her adoption advocacy, Buck concluded that a mixed-race child with an African American parent was "the most needy child both here in our country and in the lands where our soldiers stationed abroad have left children behind them." Susan Pettiss had come to this conclusion in 1957, when she commented on the consequences of racial inequality for mixed-race children in South Korean facilities. As ISS assistant director, she observed that Korean-black children were "often discriminated against in the substandard, understaffed orphanages." All mixed-race children experienced ostracism from South Koreans who believed in Korean racial purity and associated the children with military prostitution. But Korean-black children also experienced prejudice because some Koreans had learned and remade the US racial hierarchy. Buck hoped to

³⁶ Ellen Visser to Susan T. Pettiss, Jan. 15, 1955, box 35, folder ISS Branches, Korea "RRA-5" 1954–Dec. 1955, ISS records, University of Minnesota; Ellen Visser to Susan T. Pettiss, June 13, 1955, box 35, folder ISS Branches, Korea "RRA-5" 1954–Dec. 1955, ISS records, University of Minnesota; Descriptive Report—Visit to Korea of November 21–30, 1956, Dec. 1956, box 35, folder Korea Reports and Visits to Korea, 1956, ISS records, University of Minnesota. Proxy adoptions were legal until the passage of the 1961 Immigration and Nationality Act. Oh, *To Save the Children of Korea*, 150.

redress the effects of racial inequality on these children and the African Americans who wanted to adopt them.³⁷

Aware that segregation and inequality made it harder for African Americans to meet the requirements of most child welfare and adoption agencies, Buck encouraged changes to the criteria that guided many social workers in their selection of adoptive parents. In general, child welfare professionals attempted to evaluate the psychological and financial stability of prospective adoptive families before proceeding with an adoption. They favored couples who were younger than forty and could prove that the husband had a secure job, that the wife would provide full-time domestic care, that they owned a home with a separate bedroom for an adopted child, and that they had insurance policies and savings in the bank. These criteria were prohibitive for some African American prospective adoptive parents, who were usually older and not as economically stable as their white counterparts. Often these couples relied on the paid labor of both husbands and wives to maintain their households, and social workers were reluctant to approve applications from such families. Even though some adoption agencies practiced more relaxed standards that benefited African American clients in the 1950s, many did not. Consequently, children with any hint of African American heritage remained woefully underrepresented in the statistics on completed adoptions, and this pattern persisted in cases involving Korean-black children.³⁸

In April of 1958, Welcome House received its first referral for an Korean-black child, which motivated Buck to revise her statements about hybrid superiority to include the children of African American servicemen. She identified Korean-black children as beautiful, intelligent, and in many ways superior to white children. "By some particular gift of God," she argued, "the darker-skinned peoples have finer bodies, more beautiful hands and feet, than white ones do, anywhere in the world." Although Buck's extremely problematic strategy conveyed the value of half-black

³⁷Pearl S. Buck, "Welcome House," *Reader's Digest*, July 1958, 49; Susan T. Pettiss to Miss Eleanor Wright and Mary Vaughn, Mar. 26, 1956, box 10, folder ISS Adoption 1955-1958, ISS records, University of Minnesota. Katharine H. S. Moon, *Sex among Allies: Military Prostitution in U.S.-Korea Relations* (New York, 1997), 6-7, 35. Moon demonstrates that the US black-white racial hierarchy influenced the development of a stratified sex industry in Korea. Consequently, African American soldiers associated with lower-status Korean women, and the children born to such unions were targets of extreme ostracism and violence.

³⁸Herman, *Kinship by Design*, 196-97. For a case study of an agency that accommodated African American adoptive families, see Sarah Potter, *Everybody Else: Adoption and the Politics of Domestic Diversity in Postwar America* (Athens, GA, 2014).

children's bodies in essentialist terms reminiscent of those used in slave markets, she believed it called attention to the children's superior looks, intelligence, and strength. But even as Welcome House aimed to attract what Buck called "Good Negro homes" to adopt Korean-black children, she questioned, "will there be enough?" Buck thought not. She was, however, certain that there were white families who would parent Korean-black children. As she had with American born, mixed-race children of Asian descent, Buck lobbied for the placement of Korean-black children with white families. She proposed that there were "families like [hers] who would be happy to have a child they can naturally love, whatever the color of the child's skin."³⁹

Buck's attempts to increase adoptions for Korean-black children were not as successful as her efforts on behalf of other Welcome House children. Between 1957 and 1961, Welcome House received only twelve referrals for Korean-black children. This number dropped to seven in the years between 1962 and 1966. The number of referrals for Korean-black children reached its height of thirteen in the period between 1967 and June of 1971. The numbers are quite different for children who were Korean or of mixed Korean and white parentage. Between 1957 and 1961, Welcome House received ten referrals for Korean children and twenty-five referrals for Korean-white children. Those numbers increased to 88 and 300 respectively for the period from 1962–66, and 124 and 292 respectively for the period between 1967 and June of 1971. In a 1958 article for the *Hartford Times*, Buck claimed that officials in Korea and Japan were pressing transnational adoption agencies to explain why American agencies arranged more adoptions for white-Korean children than for Korean-black children.⁴⁰

Partially due to this pressure, Buck proposed that Welcome House expand its activities beyond adoption and open a facility in South Korea. According to Lois Burpee, the board considered the request in 1960. Buck advocated for the creation of an opportunity center to provide education, job training, counseling, and other services to Korean mixed-race children and their mothers. Welcome House board members did not share Buck's enthusiasm. Oscar Hammerstein opposed Buck's plan to

³⁹Buck, "Welcome House," 50; Buck, *Children for Adoption*, 123, 146–70; Buck, "Should White Parents Adopt Brown Babies?" *Ebony*, June 1958, 27, 31.

⁴⁰"Children Referred—11/1948–6/1971," Welcome House Ledgers, Administrative Office File Cabinet, Pearl S. Buck International; Buck, "Unit Provokes Racial Adoptions," *Hartford (CT) Times*, Apr. 21, 1958.

expand operations into South Korea because he did not think the agency had the resources to finance the venture. He also liked the small family structure of Welcome House and wanted to make sure the home and the agency remained solvent. Since his presence on the board attracted celebrity attention and support, Hammerstein's opinion carried considerable weight. This conflict seems to have driven a wedge between Buck and some of the Welcome House board members.⁴¹

After Hammerstein's death in August of 1960, the board lost its main fundraiser, and some members increasingly considered Buck's role in the agency to be more detrimental than helpful. As Lois Burpee recalled, board members felt that the agency was just becoming financially stable at the time of Hammerstein's death. Without the Hammersteins' fundraising, the board decided not to support an opportunity center in South Korea. Buck, however, devised a new plan. In September of 1960, she contacted members of the Child Welfare Committee in South Korea to learn more about "the mixed blood children and the unmarried mothers in Korea." The committee included representatives of Korean and international voluntary agencies, officials with the South Korean government, and officials with the United States Operation Mission (USOM) in Korea. The committee could not provide satisfactory answers to Buck's questions about either group because there was no accurate census of the groups that Korean authorities called "social handicaps." With the assistance of a \$1,000 donation from Buck's personal finances, the Child Welfare Committee created the Children's Survey Committee to conduct a national survey. The survey team reported that there were 1,518 mixed-race children and that African American men had fathered 205 of them. The report further suggested that many of the mixed-race children were "juvenile delinquents [who were] living on the streets" and becoming a growing concern to the public and the government. Buck believed the findings of the report grossly underrepresented the number of mixed-race children in Korea. In November of 1960, she took an exploratory trip to assess the situation and the feasibility of establishing an opportunity center.⁴²

⁴¹Lois Burpee, interview by Nora Stirling.

⁴²Lois Burpee, interview by Nora Stirling; Minutes of the Children's Survey Committee, The Sub-Committee of the Child Welfare Committee, Seoul, Korea, Sept. 27, 1960, box 32, folder 2, series 2, record group 1, Buck and Walsh Papers, Pearl S. Buck International Archives; Report of the Children's Survey Committee, Nation-Wide Statistics on Mixed Blood Children, Sept. 30, 1960, box 32, folder 2, series 2, record group 1, Buck and Walsh Papers, Pearl S. Buck International Archives; Hum Yun to Buck, Dec. 23, 1960, box 32, folder 11, series 2, record group 1, Buck and Walsh Papers, Pearl S. Buck International Archives; Minutes of the Children's Survey Committee,

This trip confirmed for Buck that there was a need for more services for mixed-race children in South Korea. She approached political leaders to get support. In a 1961 letter to undersecretary of state Chester Bowles, in which Buck thanked him for meeting with her to discuss US-Korean relations, she also reminded him that she was “not a sentimental person.” It was important to Buck that Bowles understand that what she was telling him had “nothing to do with sentimental feelings, only with practical common sense.” Buck used this common-sense approach when she needed to combat gender stereotypes and stress the significance of international child welfare to US foreign relations. According to Lillian E. Wolfson, a member of the foundation Buck would establish to support the opportunity center, “the child to [Buck] was a symptom of the problem and you had to help the children, of course, but international relations were [Buck’s] base interest.” Buck repeatedly claimed that she was apolitical. Her “interest has never been in politics,” she argued, “but in the thoughts of men and women.” But she developed and mobilized political strategies when advocating for transracial and transnational adoption in ways that advanced her work and highlighted her critiques of US foreign policy. In her view, for example, Americans who failed to support reforms to immigration and transnational adoption policies ignored the importance of maintaining good relations with Asian nations. But her efforts to demonstrate the link between the care of Amerasian children and the success of US foreign policies changed as her goals shifted from adoption to the long-term care of mixed-race children in Korea.⁴³

In 1963, Buck again asked Welcome House to help her launch the opportunity center, but board members remained reluctant to divert agency resources away from its transnational adoption program. In

Oct. 27, 1960, box 32, folder 2, series 2, record group 1, Buck and Walsh Papers, Archives of Pearl S. Buck International; Conn, *Pearl S. Buck*, 344–45, 362.

⁴³Buck to Chester Bowles, Apr. 28, 1961, box 32, folder 10, series 2, record group 1, Buck and Walsh Papers, Archives of Pearl S. Buck International; Buck to Robert McNamara, Feb. 16, 1968, box 43, folder 2, series 2, record group 1, Buck and Walsh Papers, Archives of Pearl S. Buck International; Lillian E. Wolfson, interview by Nora Stirling, June 26, 1976, box 12, folder “Wolfson, Lillian E., administrative assistant at the PSB Foundation,” Stirling Collection, Randolph College; Buck, *My Several Worlds*, 177. Buck offered a comprehensive critique of US-Asian relations in the book *Friend to Friend*, which she cowrote with Filipino author and diplomat Carlos P. Romulo. The book repeated Buck’s frequent claim that US militarist, economic, and cultural exploitation and oppression of Asian peoples were to blame for the growing anti-US sentiment in many Asian nations. Pearl S. Buck and Carlos P. Romulo, *Friend to Friend: A Candid Exchange between Pearl S. Buck and Carlos P. Romulo* (New York, 1958).

response, Buck reduced her involvement with Welcome House and devoted her energy and resources to the creation of the center in Sosa (Bucheon), South Korea. The Pearl S. Buck Foundation Opportunity Center office opened in 1965. Buck continued to lobby high-ranking officials in the US government for support by arguing that the care of mixed-race Korean children was central to bolstering the nation's image abroad. In a letter to Senator Edward Kennedy's legislative assistant K. Dun Gifford, Buck cautioned, "it is damaging to American prestige to have . . . the children of our sons, growing up in the lowest echelon of Asian society." Buck repeated the same sentiment in a follow-up letter to the secretary of defense, Robert McNamara, after they met to discuss the opportunity center. She also asked that he consider allowing her foundation to contact US soldiers to request financial support for the opportunity center. Unlike the French and the Dutch governments, the United States did not offer soldiers' children citizenship. The gesture of financial support, she suggested, would show people throughout Asia that officials in the United States took responsibility for children fathered by American soldiers even though the government refused to grant them citizenship.⁴⁴

Buck's vision for the opportunity center was expansive and expensive. She wanted to cultivate a network of Korean specialists—including doctors, social workers, and pharmacists—who would provide for the children and their mothers' physical, medical, and psychological needs. Buck did not want professional social workers to run the foundation or the center and instead relied on a group of young nonprofessionals to carry out the work of fundraising and day-to-day management. Buck chose young people without professional training in child welfare because, she explained, "the Amerasian child is a young people's problem," and she wanted "a fresh approach to Asia through young and brilliant Americans." But unlike the dedicated group of nonprofessionals that helped Buck develop and expand Welcome House, the inexperience of the individuals she chose to head up the foundation threatened to compromise the undertaking. Conn notes that she made poor decisions regarding the young people she hired to run the foundation, which led to controversies that damaged its credibility and reputation in both the US and Korea for many

⁴⁴Buck to Dunn [*sic*] Gifford, c/o Senator Edward Kennedy, Feb. 16, 1968, box 42, folder 2, series 2, record group 1, Buck and Walsh Papers, Archives of Pearl S. Buck International; Buck to Robert McNamara, Feb. 16, 1968; Choy, *Global Families*, 98.

years. But the foundation survived the scandals, which allowed Buck to continue coordinating services to promote the “general welfare” of the children.⁴⁵

Buck increasingly identified mixed-race children in South Korea as “the New People—the Amerasians.” The term called attention to the children’s shared American and Korean ancestry and linked them to the national communities she hoped would support the project. Without continued support, these children represented “a potential danger for the future.” In articles endorsing the opportunity center, she noted that some abandoned mixed-race Korean children “roam like wild dogs, begging in the streets, finding shelter in the culverts of the cities.” She also asserted, “I know from history and experience that lost and angry children, especially if they have brains and beauty, grow up into dangerous people.” Evoking both sympathy and fear, Buck identified a connection between the children’s hybrid superiority and dangerous vulnerability. “Many of them die in babyhood,” she noted, “and the ones who survive by tooth and claw, by begging and thievery, are above average in looks and brains.” This rhetoric focused on the double-edged nature of hybrid superiority to attract a broad base of support and appeal to individuals she believed had political influence.⁴⁶

The vulnerability of Amerasian children had international political implications as well. Buck routinely claimed that communists and the North Korean military were conspiring to enlist mixed-race children in their fight against American democracy. “Rejected by their fathers and neglected by their mothers’ peoples [*sic*],” Buck warned, “they are ready to join any group which says, ‘Comrades, we want you.’” Taking advantage of the Cold War fears of communist aggression, Buck cautioned that “the greatest danger of the future lies, namely, [*in*] a large group of stateless children who belong nowhere and are therefore a potentially dangerous force especially against our own country.” If people in the US did not take care of mixed-race children in Korea, the children would “remain

⁴⁵ Conn, *Pearl S. Buck*, 354–76; Buck to Mrs. Lorene Reierson, Mar. 21, 1961, box 38, folder 2, series 2, record group 1, Buck and Walsh Papers, Archives of Pearl S. Buck International; Buck to Dunn [*sic*] Gifford, c/o Senator Edward Kennedy, Feb. 16, 1968; Buck to Mrs. Harry Holt, Mar. 21, 1966, box 38, folder 2, series 2, record group 1, Buck and Walsh Papers, Archives of Pearl S. Buck International.

⁴⁶ Buck to Dunn [*sic*] Gifford, c/o Senator Edward Kennedy, Feb. 16, 1968; “Pearl Buck’s Children: ‘Bless the Day They were Born’”; Buck, “The Children America Forgot,” 108–9. Arissa Oh notes that Buck began applying the term “Amerasian” to mixed-race Chinese children in the 1930s. Oh, *To Save the Children of Korea*, 190.

there, as a symbol of America," which put their lives in jeopardy. Buck even claimed to have spoken with people who had "seen children of American fathers and Korean mothers killed in Korea."⁴⁷

When Buck applied the narrative of hybrid superiority to the children who remained in Korea, she relied less on sentimentality than she had to promote adoptions. This approach deemphasized the significance of motherhood as the basis of her authority in international child welfare. Buck had used the iconic image of the white mother to emphasize her gender conformity and make her activism on behalf of transracial and transnational adoption seem less threatening to US gender and race hierarchies. Christina Klein notes that "for Buck, the white mother to the nonwhite child became the emblem of anti-racist commitment and the vehicle for achieving racial harmony on a global scale." Since the opportunity center would not engage in any adoption work, Buck instead worked to reaffirm what she considered her essential, specialized knowledge of Asian cultures. Because she had spent much of the first half of her life in China, Buck patronizingly explained, "I know the Asians . . . they talk to me as one of their own, which I am, in part." She warned that officials in the US could not "shape policies wisely unless [they] know the peoples with whom we must deal." Buck designed her requests for support for the opportunity center to appeal to reason and judgment, not only sentimentality or calls to patriotism and antiracism.⁴⁸

In 1966, Buck estimated that approximately five hundred mixed-race children lived in the areas around the center in South Korea. By 1968, Buck claimed, the center had secured enough support to provide services for more than fifteen hundred Amerasian children. Buck complained, however, that the US government's lack of support for her efforts to raise funds from US servicemen limited her work in Japan, Okinawa, the Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, and South Vietnam, where she had established opportunity centers. By the late 1960s, she was particularly

⁴⁷ Buck to Dunn [*sic*] Gifford, c/o Senator Edward Kennedy, Feb. 16, 1968. Buck also mentioned this communist threat in Buck to Robert McNamara, Feb. 16, 1968; Buck, draft letter, n.d., box 38, folder 2, series 2, record group 1, Buck and Walsh Papers, Archives of Pearl S. Buck International; "Pearl Buck's Children: 'Bless the Day They were Born'"; Buck, "The Children America Forgot," 108; Buck to Mrs. Hubert Humphrey, June 13, 1966; Buck to Nathaniel Brewer, Aug. 2, 1968, box 44, folder 8, series 2, record group 1, Buck and Walsh Papers, Archives of Pearl S. Buck International.

⁴⁸ Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 178; Buck to Chester Bowles, Apr. 28, 1961, box 32, folder 10, series 2, record group 1, Buck and Walsh Papers, Archives of Pearl S. Buck International; Buck to Mrs. Hubert Humphrey, June 13, 1966; Buck to Robert Bjodstrup, Sept. 16, 1968, box 43, folder 4, series 2, record group 1, Buck and Walsh Papers, Archives of Pearl S. Buck International.

concerned about Vietnam, where war was raging and mixed-race children “were being born in such large numbers.” Although Buck opposed the Vietnam War and often stated, as she had for decades, that women were naturally inclined to support peace, she hesitated to critique US involvement in the war until she had opened an opportunity center in Vietnam. Notably, in 1966 Buck turned down a request to add her name to an anti-Vietnam War statement that included the signatures of a number of leading literary figures. She did not want to hurt her chances to facilitate adoptions from Vietnam or open an opportunity center in that country by appearing to participate in “political work.” By the time Buck opened an opportunity center in Vietnam in 1971, she was more explicit in her critiques of the Vietnam War. In one *New York Times* article, Buck commented on the divisions and unrest that accompanied antiwar protests with the warning that “we must make an end to the war in Vietnam for our own sake. . . . We need most urgently to unify ourselves.”⁴⁹

Buck’s narrative of hybrid superiority became less relevant by the early 1970s, as transnational adoption and child welfare priorities in the United States and several Asian nations shifted. For much of the 1950s, officials in the United States and South Korea had promoted the development of Korean transnational adoption largely to place mixed-race Korean children with families in the United States and Europe. By the mid-1960s, these systems expanded to accommodate full-Korean children displaced by the war and the nation’s subsequent economic instability. While some sectarian and nonsectarian agencies, including Welcome House, created programs to increase transnational adoptions of full-Korean children, several also established facilities in South Korea for Korean mixed-race children. These programs included Buck’s opportunity center, Eurasian Children Living as Indigenous Residents (ECLAIR), and facilities sponsored by Harry Holt, Christ Is the Answer Foundation, and World Vision. Some began to wonder if the increase in facilities for mixed-race Korean children would lead to their assimilation into Korean society. As Buck associate Lois Burpee suggested, “the Occidentals had . . . won the Koreans over enough so that they were accepted Koreans were

⁴⁹ Buck to Thomas Doulis, Mar. 11, 1966, box 37, folder 1, series 2, record group 1, Buck and Walsh Papers, Archives of Pearl S. Buck International; Buck to Robert McNamara, Feb. 16, 1968; Buck to Dr. Edmond Kaiser, Sept. 14, 1966, box 38, folder 3, series 2, record group 1, Buck and Walsh Papers, Archives of Pearl S. Buck International; Buck, *My Several Worlds*, 58; Buck to Mrs. Leonore G. Marshall, Apr. 7, 1966, box 37, folder 12, series 2, record group 1, Buck and Walsh Papers, Archives of Pearl S. Buck International; Pearl S. Buck, “The Two Chinas,” *New York Times*, Aug. 4, 1971.

becoming more friendly and accepting.” In spite of such optimistic assessments, mixed-race Koreans continued to face discrimination, and the work of Buck’s opportunity centers remained vital for decades after her death in 1973.⁵⁰

For more than twenty years, Buck helped create new adoption and child welfare options for mixed-race children of Asian descent in the United States and Korean GI children by challenging the prejudice and institutional standards that worked against both groups. When she founded Welcome House in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, and, later, the Pearl S. Buck Foundation, she challenged matching and other practices that made mixed-race children hard to place. Certainly Buck’s narrative of hybrid superiority essentialized the children’s physical and intellectual characteristics in ways that would burden adoptees with expectations that they were, and therefore had to be, exceptional. But in the 1950s and 1960s, she celebrated her role in facilitating the adoptions of so-called hard to place children and her work encouraging people to reimagine how mixed-race children benefited families and communities in the United States. Consequently, Buck connected the care of mixed-race children in the United States and South Korea to Cold War political discourses of liberalism, antiracism, and anticommunism. Far from signaling a retreat from her antiracist and anticolonial activities of the 1930s and 1940s, Buck’s child-centric activism stirred public and political debates about how and why adoption and child welfare policies evolved to accommodate certain children made vulnerable by domestic and international hierarchies of race.

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⁵⁰Lois Burpee, interview by Nora Stirling.